

For Immediate Release

New Survey Shows Significant Improvement in Maternal and Child Health; Challenges Remain

Kabul, November 30, 2011

Many more Afghan women are receiving skilled care today during pregnancy and delivery than a decade ago, and more women and children are surviving today than ever before as a result of greater access to health facilities and better care according to the Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS) 2010. Despite the challenging situation implementing this survey, the AMS 2010, released today, represents some 87 percent of the population and provides needed data on the current state of healthcare in Afghanistan, confirming the remarkable achievements made in the health sector over the past decade.

"The AMS 2010 is the most comprehensive national survey carried out in Afghanistan to assess mortality levels and their causes to date," said Dr. Suraya Dalil, Acting Minister of Public Health.

According to the AMS 2010, 60 percent of Afghan women are now receiving antenatal care from a skilled provider and over one-third are giving birth with assistance from a skilled birth attendant. The AMS 2010 also confirms that investments in infrastructure, education and health in the past decade have paid off. According to the AMS, fewer women are dying from pregnancy-related causes than they did seven years ago, and adult mortality has also declined.

Despite the many positive trends, the survey still documents substantial gaps. For example, two in three births still take place at home. Likewise, lack of money and distance to health care facilities remain major barriers to accessing health care.

"Pregnancy-related conditions remain a frequent cause of death among Afghan women," said Dr. Dalil. "About one in 50 Afghan women will die of pregnancy-related causes. Throughout Afghanistan, one woman dies about every two hours from pregnancy-related causes."

Dr. Dalil added, "About one in thirteen children will die before their first birthday and about one in ten children die before age 5, mostly from acute respiratory infection and other preventable causes."

The survey also shows positive changes in marriage practices and knowledge about contraception. According to the AMS 2010, Afghan women have just over five children on average. Although marriage occurs at relatively young ages, there is evidence from the AMS 2010 that age at marriage, particularly for females, is rising.

In addition to providing comprehensive information on health, the AMS documented improvements in access to clean water, sanitation, and electricity. More than half of all households now have access to improved sources of drinking water, though only one in five has improved sanitation facilities that are not shared with other households. Only about 40 percent of households have access to electricity.

While great strides have been made in the healthcare sector, there is still work to be done. "We must continue our efforts through government programs the work of NGOs, and our partnership with donors to bring quality health care to every family in Afghanistan," Dr. Dalil said.

The AMS 2010 gathered information about 22,351 households, 47,848 women and 3,157 deaths in the three years before the survey. The survey was implemented by the Afghan Public Health Institute (APHI) and the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) with technical assistance from ICF Macro, a U.S.-based research organization, the Indian Institute for Health Management Research (IIHMR), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Funding was provided by the United States Agency for International Development and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA.)

The Ministry of Health would like to express its deep appreciation to the thousands of community health workers, midwives, nurses, pharmacists, lab technicians, physicians and health care managers for all their efforts, under difficult circumstances, to improve health care in Afghanistan. The Ministry also expresses gratitude to the NGOs, professional health associations, the private sector and the international community, and most important of all, to the people of Afghanistan who have contributed to these achievements.

